STANDING COMMITTEE
on
VETERANS AFFAIRS

ANNUAL REPORT
2009 - 2010

First and Second Sessions of the Sixty-first General Assembly

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Printed and Published by the Queen's Printer
Halifax

ISSN: 1705-1541

This document is also available on the Internet at the following address:

http://gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/va_pubs.html

Legislative Committees Office
House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

3rd Floor, Dennis Building
1740 Granville Street
PO Box 2630, Station M
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3N5

Honourable Charlie Parker
Speaker
House of Assembly
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Committee for the First and Second Sessions of the Sixty-first General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

Clarrie MacKinnon, MLA, Pictou East
Chair
Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, an all-party committee of the House of Assembly, was struck at the beginning of the First Session of the Sixty-first General Assembly, pursuant to Rule 60(1) of the ***Province of Nova Scotia Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly***.

Although there is no written mandate for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, this report was written with the understanding that the committee is established for the purpose of considering matters pertaining to Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Legion.

MEMBERSHIP

There shall be no more than nine Members of the Legislative Assembly appointed to this committee. The current membership of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is as follows:

Mr. Clarrie MacKinnon, MLA – Chair
Pictou East

Mr. Gary Burrill, MLA – Vice Chair
Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley

Ms. Michèle Raymond, MLA
Halifax Atlantic

Mr. Sidney Prest, MLA
Eastern Shore

Mr. Jim Boudreau, MLA
Guysborough-Sheet Harbour

Honourable Wayne Gaudet, MLA
Clare

Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA
Digby-Annapolis

Mr. Alfie MacLeod, MLA
Cape Breton West

Mr. Allan MacMaster, MLA
Inverness

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

During the First and Second Sessions of the Sixty-first General Assembly, the committee underwent the following membership changes:

Honourable Murray Scott was replaced by Mr. Allan MacMaster.
Honourable Richard Hurlburt was replaced by Mr. Alfie MacLeod.
Mr. Trevor Zinck was replaced by Mr. Jim Boudreau.

PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

The Veterans Affairs Committee traditionally meets once a month. These meetings are usually held on the second Thursday of the month in the Legislative Committees Office. During the First and Second Sessions of the Sixty-first General Assembly the committee met on the following dates:

October 8, 2009
November 26, 2009
January 14, 2010
February 18, 2010
March 11, 2010
May 20, 2010
June 10, 2010

NOTICES, TRANSCRIPTS AND REPORTS

NOTICES

Notices of the committee meetings are sent to all members of the committee, caucus office staff, legislative staff and the House of Assembly press gallery. The notices are also posted in Province House and on the Veterans Affairs Committee website at the following address: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/schedva.html

TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts of all Veterans Affairs Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Library in Province House, the Legislative Committees Office or, online at the Veterans Affairs Committee website at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/

REPORTS

All reports of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to committee members for consideration. Once the report is finalized, it is then distributed as follows:

To the Speaker and the Clerk of the House of Assembly, all Members of the Legislative Assembly, all witnesses who appeared before the committee, the Legislative Library in Nova Scotia and in other provinces and territories, the caucus offices and the media. This report is also available to the general public on request from the Legislative Committees Office and is available online at the committee's website at the following address:
http://gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/va_pubs.html

RESEARCH MATERIAL

Research material for the Veterans Affairs Committee is compiled by the Legislative Library and distributed to members by the committee clerk. Reference material is provided to members and caucus staff prior to the meeting date. A copy of this material is also made available to the witnesses appearing before the committee, the Legislative Library in Province House and to Hansard Reporting Services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee wishes to extend its gratitude to all witnesses for their time and co-operation; as well as to the staff of the Legislative Committees Office, for their coordination of committee meetings; and to Ms. Heather Ludlow, Information Services Librarian, for the organization of research for committee meetings. Others whose assistance has been invaluable to the committee are: Mr. Robert Kinsman, Editor of Hansard Reporting Services, and staff; Mr. James MacInnes, Coordinator/Director of Legislative Television and Broadcast Services, and staff; and Ms. Margaret Murphy, Legislative Librarian, and staff.

WITNESSES

October 8, 2009	**Organizational**
November 26, 2009	**Royal Canadian Legion - Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command**
January 14, 2010	**Veterans Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region)**
February 18, 2010	**Canadian Forces** **Re: Reservists**
March 11, 2010	**Captain(N) Craig Walkington** **Re: Canadian Naval Centennial**
March 11, 2010	**Rear-Admiral(retired) Barry Keeler** **Re: Last Post Fund**
May 20, 2010	**Department of Health** **Re: Long-Term Care for Veterans**
May 20, 2010	**Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre** **Re: Military Family Resource Centres**
June 10, 2010	**Veterans Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region)** **Re: Agent Orange Compensation**

PUBLIC

HEARINGS

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING — October 8, 2009

WITNESSES

No witnesses are present at organizational meetings.

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The committee met to organize their agenda of potential witnesses and topics for future meetings.

The committee agreed that it would not meet when the House of Assembly is in session.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for documentation.

TRANSCRIPT

Further reference to this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2009oct08.htm

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION – NOVA SCOTIA/NUNAVUT COMMAND — November 26, 2009

WITNESSES

Royal Canadian Legion-Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command
Mr. Les Nash, Command President
Mr. David Blanchard, Immediate Past President
Mr. Jack Hatcher, Command Treasurer
Mr. Steve Wessel, Command Chairman
Mr. Marc Gauthier, Command Service Officer

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain information on the services provided by the Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command. As well, a number of issues of concern to the Command were brought to the attention of committee members.

MOTIONS

The Command expressed their concern regarding the lack of annual funding to assist with necessary repairs to legion branches. In response to this concern, the following motions were passed:

> "That the Veterans Affairs Committee request the provincial government to work with the Royal Canadian Legion, Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, to establish an annual grant program to assist the legions throughout the province in regard to capital needs."

> "I would like this committee to consider writing a letter on behalf of the Nova Scotia/ Nunavut Command to request, through Veterans Affairs, that consideration should be given to allow Legions to apply for assistance for repairs under the Building Canada Fund."

A response was received from Premier Darrell Dexter, as follows:

> "As you are well aware, the provinces faces a difficult fiscal situation, however I have directed the relevant Ministers, led by the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to examine this issue. My Government and all Nova Scotians recognize the important role played by Legions in our communities."

A response was received from the Honourable John Baird, Federal Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities as follows:

> "As you may know, this fund invests in critical national priorities, such as clean water, sewage treatment, the core National Highway System, public transit, and green energy, while also addressing local priorities and objectives such as

> cultural, sport or recreational facilities. In all cases, the focus of the Building Canada Fund is public infrastructure – a facility or other type of infrastructure that falls within one of the program's eligible categories and is primarily for the use or benefit of the greater public. . . . Unfortunately, given the set program parameters outlined above, the renovation or construction of the Legion halls is not eligible under the Building Canada Fund."

The Command expressed concern regarding the inability of Legion branches with VLT machines to have ATM/ABM machines that accept credit cards on their premises. The committee passed the following motion:

> "That the committee call upon the minister responsible for gaming in our province to consider an exemption to the Legions from this policy."

A response was received from the Honourable Marilyn More, Minister of Labour and Workforce Development as follows:

> "It is our understanding that the removal of the credit card functionality is a policy decision made by the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation (NSGC) and Atlantic Lottery Corporation (ALC) that has been incorporated into the retailer policies that each video lottery retailer in Nova Scotia must adhere to. The Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation is the entity that is responsible for the Management of gambling on behalf of the Province pursuant to Part 1 of the Gaming Control Act. For your benefit, our staff have made contact with the Gaming Corporation to discuss the matter and to seek some guidance for you.
>
> From discussions with the NSGC, it appears that the Video Lottery Retailer Policies state under Section 4.4 ATMs/AMBs: that retailers must ensure that any automated banking machines (ABM) or cash machines on the Approved Premises are not located within the Designated Gaming Area and do not have the functionality to allow Players to access credit from credit cards. This applies to all liquor licensed establishments that operate Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs).
>
> They have explained that this policy exists to ensure video lottery players are only wagering money they have and are not using credit to obtain cash advances to pursue video lottery gaming."

The Command feels the tax that is levied on bingo "Cookie Jar" winnings should be discontinued because they receive no portion of these funds. The committee passed the following motion regarding this issue:

> "That the committee pursue the recommendations that are before our committee to request officials from the Department of Finance to consider discontinuing the 2.5 per cent tax charged to Legions with regard to the

> bingos and to have the Department of Finance provide an answer as to the potential impact, financially on the province that this might have."

The Honourable Graham Steele, Minister of Finance provided the following response:

> "The 2.5 per cent tax referred to by Royal Canadian Legion representatives is actually a 2.13 per cent fee levied on all charitable bingo licensees to recover the cost of administering the Bingo Lottery Regulations. The operators of a charitable bingo are required to pay a license prize fee of 2.13% of the value of prizes awarded. The Alcohol and Gaming Division of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development is responsible for fees referenced in your letter.
>
> I am copying our colleague, the Honourable Marilyn More, Minister Labour Workforce and Development, so that she may have the Alcohol and Gaming Authority consider this amendment."

The Command expressed a concern regarding the policy of the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services of treating veterans' disability benefits as income when determining eligibility for social housing programs. The committee passed the following motion:

> "That we again write the Minister of Community Services requesting that she look at this issue and the recommendation from the Legion Command ensuring that with her response she has the most updated information on the provinces that have exemptions, and that we would support the exemption of those funds being calculated in their household income for purposes of social housing upgrade grants."

The Honourable Denise Peterson-Rafuse, Minister of Community Services provided the following response:

> "Eligibility for public housing and the calculation of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) is based upon total household income as defined by Statistics Canada in the Household Income, Facilities and Equipment data base (HIFE). Federal and provincial government social housing programs use total household income, as defined by HIFE, to ensure that housing assistance is available to those most in need.
>
> With respect to the calculation of rent, exempting disability pensions from the definition of income would result in significant inequities in the calculation of RGI. Some low-income households would pay higher rents than households that have higher incomes due to the disability pension.
>
> Community Services remains committed to ensuring all its public housing tenants are treated in a manner that is fair, consistent and equitable.

> Therefore, at this time, the Department is unable to exempt Veteran's Disability Pensions from the definition of income."

The response provided by Minister Peterson-Rafuse is receiving further consideration by the committee.

The Command indicated that it would like to have additional signage placed along the Veterans Memorial Highway and improvements to the area near the sign at the Miller Lake exit to increase awareness of veterans. The following motions were passed by the committee:

> "To call upon the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to increase the number of signs on our Veterans Memorial Highway, and we're calling upon the same minister to consult with our guests, members of Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, to further determine the appropriate number of signs needed along this particular highway."

> "That we ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to begin dialogue around the issue of the upgrade to that large sign in the Miller Lake area for consideration."

The following response was received from the Honourable Bill Estabrooks, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal:

> ". . ., the Department will install four (4) additional Veterans' Memorial Highway signs to promote awareness and support of our veterans. . . . With respect to the existing sign near Miller Lake, the Department will extend the same opportunity (as with the Truro Veterans Memorial Highway sign) to the members of the Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command to upgrade the ground in the vicinity of the "Veterans Memorial Highway" sign."

A resolution was presented to the committee which encouraged the federal government to end the policy of reducing military and RCMP veterans' pensions upon receipt of Canada Pension Plan benefits. It was indicated that Bill C-201, which dealt with this issue, was defeated. The following motion was passed by the committee:

> "That the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly expresses its regret that all the clauses of Bill C-201 were defeated at committee and urges the Government of Canada to re-examine the merits of the proposal contained within the bill."

The committee received a response from the Honourable John-Pierre Blackburn, Federal Minister of Veterans Affairs, indicating that this matter is the responsibility of the

Honourable Peter MacKay, Federal Minister of National Defence, and that he has forwarded our correspondence to Minister MacKay for response.

DOCUMENTATION

The Command did not have sufficient copies of the booklet, "An Act to Incorporate the Royal Canadian Legion," to provide to committee members when they appeared before the committee. Additional copies were provided later by the Command and distributed to all committee members.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2009nov26.htm

VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA (ATLANTIC REGION) January 14, 2010

WITNESSES

Veteran Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region)
Ms. Teressa Laforest, Acting Associate Regional Director General
Veterans Affairs Canada – Atlantic Region
Ms. Michelle Wright, Regional Communications Officer (Atlantic)
Ms. Lisa Jessome, Client Service Team Manager, Halifax District Office
Mr. Barry Gallant, Regional Director, Client Services

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain an overview of the services and programs provided by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received:

- A list of VAC representatives around the province.
- Information regarding the Community Engagement Partnership Fund.
- Can or will the criteria of the Canada Remembers Cenotaph Restoration Program be changed to include covering the cost of adding names to existing monuments?

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010jan14.htm

CANADIAN FORCES / RESERVES **February 18, 2010**

WITNESSES

Captain(Navy) Craig Walkington, Naval Reserve Director of Strategic Management & Naval Reserve Regional Advisor Atlantic
Lieutenant Colonel Robert Grant, Team Leader – Contingency Planning Team Nova Scotia, 36 Canadian Brigade Group Headquarters
Lieutenant Colonel Don McLeod, A1 Air Reserve Coordinator East, 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters, Detachment Halifax

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain an overview of the Reserve Force, with a particular focus on the Reserve Force in Nova Scotia.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for documentation.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010feb18.htm

CANADIAN NAVAL CENTENNIAL — March 11, 2010

WITNESSES

Captain(Navy) Craig Walkington, Coordinator, MARLANT Canadian Naval Centennial Project

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of this meeting was to obtain an overview of events and activities associated with the 100th Anniversary of the Canadian Navy.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for documentation.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010mar11.htm

LAST POST FUND — March 11, 2010

WITNESSES

Rear-Admiral(retired) Barry Keeler, President, Last Post Fund - Nova Scotia Branch

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of this meeting was to obtain an overview of the Last Post Fund and the services it provides.

MOTIONS

It was indicated that although the number of traditional veterans is decreasing, there are now modern-day veterans who may need assistance. Currently, modern-day veterans are not eligible to apply for assistance through the Last Post Fund. It was also indicated that the financial limits have not been increased for many years. The committee agreed as follows:

> "That a letter of support be written to the federal government to indicate the need to consider modern day veterans who may not have the financial resources to have a deserving, appropriate burial and to indicate the need to consider an increase to the financial limits."

No response has been received to date.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for documentation.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010mar11.htm

LONG-TERM CARE FOR VETERANS — May 20, 2010

WITNESSES

Department of Health
Mr. Kevin McNamara, Deputy Minister
Mr. Keith Menzies, Executive Director, Continuing Care
Ms. Carolyn Maxwell, Acting Director, Business and Service Support

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain information regarding long-term care for veterans and the connectivity between provincial and federal programs.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received:

- Is the cost of the drug Lucentis covered for veterans?
- Do veterans have access to palliative care through the Veterans Independence Program?

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010may20.htm

MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES — May 20, 2010

WITNESSES

Halifax and Region Military Family Resource Centre
Ms. Lauren Copeland, Childcare Services Coordinator
Ms. Emily Hatcher, Resource Development

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of Military Family Resource Centres and the services they provide to military families.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no requests for documentation.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010mya20.htm

AGENT ORANGE COMPENSATION — June 10, 2010

WITNESSES

Veterans Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region)
Mr. Barry Gallant - Regional Director, Client Services
Ms. Lorraine Gailey - Regional Director, Communications and Regional Director, Canada Remembers

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of the meeting was to obtain an update on the Agent Orange Compensation Program.

MOTION

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received:

- How was the $20,000.00 compensation amount determined?
- Were the chemicals used at the Gagetown base tested in the United States?
- How many people were situated at the Gagetown base or living within 5 kms of the Base during the two summers in question?
- Have the allegations that chemicals were buried at the Gagetown base been investigated and proven false?

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2010jun10.htm

STATEMENT

OF

SUBMISSION

STATEMENT OF SUBMISSION

All of which is respectfully submitted to the
House of Assembly this 9th day of September, 2010

Mr. Clarrie MacKinnon, MLA
Chair

I concur

Mr. Gary Burrill, MLA
(Vice Chair)

I concur

Honourable Wayne Gaudet, MLA

I concur

Mr. Jim Boudreau, MLA

I concur

Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA

I concur

Ms. Michèle Raymond, MLA

I concur

Mr. Alfie MacLeod, MLA

I concur

Mr. Sidney Prest, MLA

I concur

Mr. Allan MacMaster, MLA

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - MOTIONS

The following is a list of documents received in response to motions of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command – November 26, 2009

- Correspondence from the Honourable Darrell Dexter, Premier of Nova Scotia.
- Correspondence from the Honourable John Baird, Federal Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.
- Correspondence from the Honourable Marilyn More, Minister of Labour and Workforce Development.
- Correspondence from the Honourable Graham Steele, Minister of Finance.
- Correspondence from the Honourable Denise Peterson-Rafuse, Minister of Community Services.
- Correspondence from the Honourable Bill Estabrooks, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

APPENDIX B - DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of documents and information requested and received by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Veterans Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region) - January 14, 2010

- A list of VAC representatives around the province.
- Information regarding the Community Engagement Partnership Fund.
- Information regarding the Canada Remembers Cenotaph Restoration Program.

Department of Health – Long-Term Care for Veterans - May 20, 2010

- Information regarding veterans' access to the drug Lucentis.
- Information regarding veterans' access to palliative care through the Veterans Independence Program.

Veterans Affairs Canada (Atlantic Region) – Agent Orange Compensation - June 10, 2010

- Information regarding how the $20,000.00 compensation amount was determined.
- Information regarding whether or not the chemicals used at the Gagetown base were tested in the United States.
- Information regarding how many people were situated at the Gagetown base or living within 5 kms of the base during the two summers in question.
- Information regarding whether or not allegations that chemicals were buried at the Gagetown base have been investigated and proven false.

Legislative Committees Office
3rd Floor, Dennis Building
1740 Granville Street
PO Box 2630, Station "M"
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3N5

Telephone: (902) 424-4432 or Toll Free 1-888-388-6489
Fax: (902) 424-0513
E-Mail: legcomm@gov.ns.ca

Website: http://gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/veteran_affairs.html